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POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,  
OFFICE OF FIRST ASS'T POSTMASTER GENERAL,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., June 24, 1882.

LESTER F. WARD, ESQ., National Museum, Washington, D. C.:

*Sir*—Your communication of the 21st inst., addressed to the Postmaster General, has been referred to this office for reply.

The labels submitted by you, so far as they contain simply the name of the plant, and as necessary to fix that name, the name of the person making the classification, adding, as part of the name, the variety, and the name of the person classifying, will be held to be within the language of the Statutes. But it is impossible, by any fair construction, to authorize a statement of the kind of soil in which the plant grows, or the locality from which it comes, or the date at which the plant is obtained, or the date at which it flowers, or yields fruit.

All these descriptive matters might be placed upon the label, by the use of a gelatine pad, thus making a reproduction of the matter; or, by the use of a hand stamp. You are respectfully referred to Rulings 319 and 320, January Postal Guide, 1882, page 719, a copy of which will be sent to you, through the Post Office.

Your labels and communication are respectfully returned.

Very respectfully,

E. C. FOWLER,  
For First Assistant Postmaster General.

*Decumaria barbara*.—On May 29th of this year, in company with Dr. Frank Baker, I paid a brief visit to the Dismal Swamp of Virginia. My principal object was to find if possible that handsome vine, *Decumaria barbara*, L., which I had seen in the swamp in 1876, when, in company with Prof. Chickering and Mr. Morong, I had enjoyed a three days' sojourn in that wilderness of amber-colored waters.

As on that occasion the plant was not seen till we had penetrated far into the swamp on what is known as the Jericho Canal to near the open lake, and as on the present one, starting from Bowers Hill Station on the Seaboard & Roanoake R. R., we could only find ditches that would lead us in a distance of about two miles, we were by no means sanguine of success. But successful we were, and found many large and beautiful vines climbing the great gum trees. They were in full bloom and the problem was to reach the flowers.

As your readers probably know, this vine climbs by means of fine rootlets, after the manner of *Rhus Toxicodendron*, which it much resembles in many other respects, and with which it vies in the Dismal Swamp for the possession of the finest supports. To climb to the lowest flowering branches was impossible, and after reaching the verge of despair, the thought struck us of severing a

vine at the base, and, by detaching it for a long distance from the tree to which it clung, to bring down, if possible, the flower-bearing portion. Though a barbarous proceeding we nerved ourselves to it and our efforts were crowned with abundant success.

This plant, as your readers all probably know, is not described in Gray's "Manual," fifth edition, but whether its discovery in the Dismal Swamp in 1876, on the occasion above mentioned, was its first appearance north of the southern boundary line of Virginia, I do not know. However that may be, I thought it might interest some to know that it had been found at the northern border of the swamp and within ten miles of Norfolk.—LESTER F. WARD.

**Proterogyn in *Sparganium eurycarpum*.**—In a marsh near the Eastern Branch of the Potomac I found a few days since the finest patch of *Sparganium eurycarpum* that I ever saw, the developed white blossoms being conspicuous from a distance. On approaching and examining them I perceived that the plant was very obviously proterogynous. The two distinct states were so clearly marked that they gave the appearance of two kinds of plants. Those on which the fertile heads were developed and the stigmas ready to receive pollen invariably had all the staminate heads undeveloped, while those in which the staminate heads were developed had in all cases commenced to form fruit. Still a third state occurred in which anthesis was entirely past in both kinds of heads and large heads of fruit had formed. While the order of development of the pistillate and staminate heads was always the same, abundance of plants existed in both states, so that fertilization was possible, yet a careful search failed to reveal a single plant in which the time of expansion of the male and female flowers was synchronous—*i. e.*, in which self-fertilization could have taken place.—LESTER F. WARD.

**Contributions to North American Botany, by Asa Gray:** Proc. Am. Acad. Vol. XVII.—It is almost impossible to appreciate the amount of labor represented by this contribution. In his elaboration of the vast family of *Compositæ* as displayed in North America, Dr. Gray's work has been of the most laborious and intricate kind. No living botanist could have conducted us half so well through such a bewildering maze of forms and synonyms, and the consultation of type specimens in the older herbaria has not in all cases shed a flood of light. Probably *Aster* and *Solidago* are two of the most vexatious genera of this great family as all botanists will testify in whose herbaria are lurking many unplaceable forms. The first part of this paper is devoted to the record of some of the results of the study of these difficult genera in the older herbaria and their difficulty can best be appreciated when Dr. Gray, who has seen more type-specimens of the species and has given more time to the systematic study of these genera than any one testifies